



For Immediate Release  
April 30, 2008

Contact: Dan Virkstis  
202-224-4515

**Remarks by Senator Max Baucus  
Before the Council on Competitiveness  
Launching *Thrive. The Skills Imperative***

For more than two decades, the Council on Competitiveness has gathered our nation's brightest minds to draw a roadmap to where American workers and our economy need to go. It is a pleasure to be here today to launch yet another impressive Council on Competitiveness initiative.

I'm honored to Co-Chair this newest initiative with Senator Lugar. I am sorry that Senator Lugar could not join us today. But I look forward to working with him, with the Council, and with all of you to make *The Skills Imperative* not just a report, but a national priority.

**Highway 93 To The Future**

Today's world economy conjures global images. We picture a future in international markets and in European, Chinese, and Indian consumers. We see comprehensive agreements breaking open foreign markets. We see global transportation links and worldwide communications networks bridging nations. We envision global research, global competitors, and global success.

Yet for me, America's picture of economic success and potential lies a little closer to home. It is the view not from an information superhighway, but from our country's back roads, like Montana's Highway 93. With just one lane in either direction, it bisects towns of just a few hundred. On a good day, you might just hit 65 miles per hour.

The view from Highway 93 might not look like a foothold in an economy changing at breakneck speed. But take a left at Stevensville. There, expert machinists at Bitterroot Tool and Machine transform nickel into rivets every few seconds. Those rivets hold together most of the world's commercial passenger aircraft flying today. Down the road, skilled welders and engineers at Selway Corporation build the massive steel infrastructure for America's mining and hydroelectric operations.

Drive a few more miles down 93 to Hamilton, Montana. There you will see a skilled workforce that binds not steel, but molecules. There you'll see the workforce that underpins a growing biotech industry.

Another 50 miles up the road brings you to Missoula. There, a growing services sector is the number-one driver of employment and the biggest booster of higher wages.

--more--

### Competing On Quality

These are Montana's successes. And they are its foothold in our global economy. But what binds these competitive Montana industries is not our two lane highways. No infrastructure can guarantee success. Looking at Montana's place in the global economy, one might consider us to be at a distinct disadvantage. Montana is remote and sparsely populated. We have no major transportation hub, no major port, and no major manufacturing base.

But Montana competes and wins with its workforce and their superior skills. These are the skills of brilliant PhDs and engineers. These are the skills of a well-educated cadre of university graduates. These are the skills of a legion of machinists and technical workers. Each worker applies his or her own skill, and all work hand in hand.

With these skills, we work with what we have. And we make the most of it. Sometimes we have to start small. But our skills mean starting small does not mean that we don't think big — and win even bigger. Turn off any one of Montana's roads, and you will see a skilled workforce producing goods and services that stack up locally, nationally, and worldwide.

### Bracing For Uncertainty

The Council on Competitiveness and the Thrive initiative recognize what I see in Montana — that skills are our richest resource. They recognize that skills are our most sustainable competitive advantage.

But the Council and all of us here also see the turbulence and change of globalization today. We see the evolving trade, energy, and technology dynamics of tomorrow. And we see worrisome demographic trends a decade from now.

Every change brings the risk of uncertainty and the promise of opportunity. We must heed the call of the Council on Competitiveness. We must respond to these changes by strengthening what we do best and what we know — our skills.

We must build on our strengths by training and educating workers not for just the jobs that are, but for the jobs that will be. We need to better understand the scope, dynamism, and promise of our services economy. And we need to take our existing skills and invigorate them with entrepreneurship and innovation to keep our thinking fresh and creative.

Focusing on our skills imperative, we will create an island of stability in turbulent tides of international trade and globalization. Focusing on our skills imperative, we will build a bridge from where our economy is now, to where we need to go.

### Advancing The Agenda

We know that a skilled workforce is at the heart of Montana's economy, as it is the lifeblood of our nation's growth. We know that as globalization transforms our economy, we need to develop skills for new services and goods industries. We need skills for the jobs that cannot easily be off-shored.

--more--

So where do we begin? What do we do next? How do we advance a skills agenda to strengthen our economy?

Last summer, we made a start. Together with Senator Snowe, I introduced legislation to enhance and reform our Trade Adjustment Assistance program. TAA helps workers displaced by international trade get back on their feet by helping those workers to develop the skills to compete and win in our international economy.

I propose that we expand TAA to the services industry for the first time. We need to recognize the value of services sector workers and their contribution to the economy.

I propose that we double the amount of retraining funds available to workers who lose their jobs as a result of trade. We need to allow workers to retrain and retool for the jobs of the 21st century economy.

Workers qualifying for TAA training today are choosing the most competitive sectors available. Workers like Jerry Ross from Eureka, Montana. After she was laid off from her job at a saw mill, Jerry retrained to become a construction superintendent.

An expanded TAA will match these willing workers like Jerry with existing and new job needs. As American businesses create skilled positions in services, technical, and “sustainable” industries, TAA-eligible workers will help to meet those workforce needs. They simply need the long-term training that additional funding and an improved program can provide.

TAA is just the beginning. We can do more.

We can do more as policy-makers, we can do more as employers. And we can do more as educators.

We can do more to invest in our workforce and make training available to our workers. We can do more to be creative and innovative. We can do more to think about what the competitiveness of our economy and our workers should look like five and ten years down the road.

I look forward to working with the Council, its experts, and my colleagues to develop and implement an agenda. I challenge all of us to work together.

### Conclusion

Cutting between the Bitterroot and the Sapphire mountain ranges, the view from Montana’s Highway 93 is best known for its striking natural beauty. To some on the East Coast, it is known as the road to Charles Schwab’s famous luxury private resort, the Stock Farm.

But it pays to slow down and see the real Highway 93. It pays to slow down and look closer to see the amazing accomplishments of our skilled workers. It pays to understand how the American and the world economies look through their eyes. And working together, with initiatives like The Skills Imperative, it pays to think about a vision of where we need to go.

###